

# The Russian *Okrainy* (Окраины) and the Polish *Kresy*: Objectivity and Historiography<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The Russian term *okrainy* and the Polish concept of *kresy* tend to refer to the same spatial area, or the non-Russian and non-Polish nation-states that after the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union extend between the Russian Federation and Poland. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the interwar period, both the terms *okrainy* and *kresy* underwrote the Russian and Polish territorial expansion and the *mission civilisatrice* in these areas, most visibly exemplified by the policies of Russification and Polonization, respectively. Frequently, Russification was compounded with the state-supported spread of Orthodox Christianity, while in Polonization's case with that of Roman Catholicism. These two terms, *okrainy* and *kresy*, fell out of official use during the communist period, but resurfaced in Russia and Poland for a variety of ideologized ends by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with little respect for the countries and nations concerned.

**Keywords:** 'civilizing mission,' *kresy*, imperialism, nationalism, *okrainy*, Poland, Poland-Lithuania, post-Polish-Lithuanian states, Russia

The Russian historiographic perception of the post-Soviet nation-states of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine (and at times also of Finland) tends to be mediated through the term *окраины* *okrainy*. Similarly, though only regarding Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine (at times, also Latvia), Polish historians often employ the term *kresy*. To a degree, both terms have been accepted, respectively, in Russia and Poland, as presumably neutral terms of analysis, deployed for researching the past of these countries in conjunction with Russian (imperial) and Polish(-Lithuanian) history. Tellingly, scholars and intellectuals in the countries denoted by the terms *okrainy* and *kresy* do not frame the separate (or nationally separable) pasts of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, or Ukraine with the use of these two concepts, which they actually see as alien, and in many cases as anti-Belarusian, anti-Latvian, anti-Lithuanian, anti-Moldovan, or anti-Ukrainian. Hence, the question arises whether these two terms are as neutral as Russian and Polish historians like to maintain.

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**Russia's western okrainy (Borders 1921 [copyright-free])**

NB: The territories ceded by Russia, evacuated by Germany, or their status to be decided in line with the principle of national self-determination, according to the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918). Apart from these areas also Bessarabia (today's Moldova) alongside the region of Vitebsk (Viciebsk) and

Mohileff (Mahiloŭ) (or present-day eastern Belarus) were seen as part of Russia's western *okrainy*. In addition, during the Great War St. Petersburg intended to annex Austria-Hungary's crownland of Galicia, seen as an 'unredeemed part of the Russian lands.' In this sense, at least central and eastern Galicia also falls under the term western *okrainy*.

## ***Okrainy*: Russian Imperialism**

Ostensibly, the Russian word *окраина* *okraina* means 'periphery' or 'edge' be it of a locality or an (administrative) region. From the same Church Slavonic word *оукраина* *oukraina*, attested between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the term *украина* *ukraina* emerged in Poland-Lithuania during the 16<sup>th</sup> century for referring to the 'eastern peripheral region' in this polity (Halushko 2016: 10-13). Eventually, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this term yielded a name for the country of Ukraine. In Russian the meaning of 'a periphery of a state,' or 'borderland,' began to be denoted with the plural form of the noun *okraina*, that is, *окраины* *okrainy* (cf Pereverzov 1788: 122-123). Both forms of this common Russian noun continued to be used equitably until the 1830s. Then the anti-tsarist uprising of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility (1830-1831) prompted the Russian ruling elite in 1833 to adopt the new homogenizing imperial ideology of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.<sup>2</sup> This ideology drew a clear line of distinction – in ethnic and spatial terms – between the Orthodox and Russophone (Muscovian) core of the Russian Empire and its non-Orthodox and/or non-Russophone (border) regions, or *okrainy*. 'Russophone' in this historic context meant Orthodox Slavic-speakers whose elite employed invariably Cyrillic for writing. This script was seen as 'Orthodox' or 'Russian' letters, ideologically opposed to the 'Polish' or 'Latin' letters (Flynn 1986; Whittaker 1978).

This new imperial ideology Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality as adopted by the imperial government, resulted in a series of policies and actions directed toward the 'non-Russian' peripheries (*okrainy*) of the Empire. With the privilege of hindsight, it can be proposed that the overall goal was the homogenization of non-Russian populations either through voluntary adaption (or imposition) of Orthodoxy or the Russian language, or at best, both (Staliunas 2003). (Obviously, officials who gradually developed this policy through the accruing of a myriad of decisions dictated by a variety of interests did not have such a clear awareness of the policy's aim.) From the imperial perspective it was a positive modernizing policy of 'Russianizing' (*обрусение* *obrusenie*) (cf Kartavtsov 1877), a view shared by some ethnically non-Russian subjects. However, critics of this policy, stemming from among the targeted populations, saw it as an unwanted imposition from above, which they branded with the negative term Russification (*русификация* *rusifikatsiia*) (Dzyuba 1968; Т G 1916: 7). This socio-political point break caused the emergence of the plural form *окраины* *okrainy* as a widely accepted term in its own right. Imperial scholars and administrators began to use it for referring to the

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<sup>2</sup> Another significant (but rarely reflected upon) ideological development brought about the 1830-1831 uprising was the change in the official Russian name of the Russian language from *Российский* *Rossiiskii* to *Русский* *Russkii*. As a result, the new name of this language diverged from the empire's name of *Россия* *Rossiiia*. The pre-1830s form of the name of the Russian language, survives in Belarusian (*Расейская* *Raseiskaia*), Polish (*Rosyjski*), or Ukrainian (*Російська* *Rosiis'ka*) (Kamusella 2012; Miller 2009).



'non-Russian' peripheries of the Russian Empire that 'needed Russianizing (*obrusenie*).'<sup>3</sup> Until the mid-1830s the single and plural forms of this common noun *okraina* were employed with the same frequency. Afterward, the plural form came to be used two to three times more frequently from the late 1830s through the 1860s, announcing the firm coining of the plural form *okrainy* into an accepted scholarly and political term (окраина, окраины 2018). The appearance of the first monographs on such 'non-Russian' peripheries with this term in the title, announced the rise of the subsequently ubiquitous collocation окраины России *okrainy Rossii* ('Russia's borderlands') (Samarin 1869; Thaden 1974).

The hay-day of this highly ideologized use of the plural form *okrainy* as a concept in its own right coincided with the pinnacle of the imperial expansion of Russia, or the period from the 1880s until the Great War (Bagaliei 1887; Petrovskii 1894; Semenov 1900). The plural form *okrainy* was employed five to six times more often than the singular form *okraina* (окраина, окраины 2018). Obviously, conquering new territories and securing recently annexed lands made this term into part and parcel of the imperial military lexicon (Shapiro 1909), including cartographic material (Zolotarev 1903). Russian imperial elites active in central Asia and the Far East were only too well aware of the ever-present perils of imperial (over-) extension, especially in light of the criticized 1867 sale of Alaska to the United States (cf Mify 2017; Pochemu 2017). This existential angst translated into titles featuring the term *okraina* for some newspapers published in these far-flung outposts (*Dalekaia* 1907-1917; *Russkaia* 1906-1908). The burning question was how to ensure a permanent 'unification of the borderlands with the empire' (воссоединение окраин с центром *vossoedinenie okrain s tsentrom*). This problem of imperial policy was often expressed by discussing the dilemma whether some borderlands could be actually given up as autonomous or independent states to their respective populations of 'foreigners' (инородцы *innorodtsy*),<sup>3</sup> that is, ethnic non-Russians (Budilovich 1907; Messarosh 1897). However, in the imperial discourse on Russia's окраины *okrainy* most attention was paid to the 'western borderlands,' or the former lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (cf Arsen'eva 1907). This should not surprise, as this section of the Russian Empire was economically and educationally the most developed and the most densely populated. The vivid geostrategic problem was that this economic core was spatially and ethnically separated from the empire's political and religious center at St. Petersburg and Moscow (Industrialnyi 1982; Karta evropeiskoi 1901; Karta zheleznykh c 1916).

The German and Austro-Hungarian occupation of Russia's western *okrainy* during World War I was a shock with which the imperial elite was unable to come to terms. The subsequent breakup of the Russian Empire in the wake of the February and Bolshevik revolutions made this loss in most cases permanent, sealed by the emergence of Estonia, Finland Latvia, Lithuania and Poland as independent nation-states. The early

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<sup>3</sup> Jews were the main target of the official imperial policy of excluding *innorodtsy* from Russian society. In the western *okrainy*, or more exactly in Russia's share of the partitioned Poland-Lithuania, the Pale of Settlement (Черта оседлости *Cherta osedlosti*) was established, outside which Jews were banned to reside. This discriminatory Pale of Settlement existed from 1791 to 1917, though in reality Austria-Hungary and Germany's seizure of the western *okrainy* terminated it in 1915 (Deutsch 2011; Karta iugo-zapadnykh 1884).

Soviet Union, fighting for survival, had no choice but to accept this situation. Furthermore, to ensure more legitimacy for the Bolshevik regime, the ethnically non-Russian areas in this country were made into union and autonomous (ethnic) republics (Martin 2001). The imperial term *okrainy* disappeared from official administrative and political usage, but remained part and parcel of everyday language in the Soviet Union. The plural form *okrainy* continued to predominate three or four times over the use of the singular form *okraina*. The same is true of the current usage of both forms in the post-Soviet Russian Federation (окраина, окраины 2018). Significantly, the loss of the 'near abroad' (ближнее зарубежье *blizhnee zarubezh'e*)<sup>4</sup> following the split of the Soviet Union, widely perceived as 'unjustified' by the Russian elite, brought back the plural form *okraina* as a term of scholarly and political analysis (Balaev 2008; Dolbilov and Miller 2006; Dubman and Kabytov 2006). Not surprisingly, most attention is paid to the 'western and southern borderlands' (западные окраины *zapadnye okrainy*, южные окраины *iuzhnye okrainy*) reflecting, respectively, post-Soviet Russia's deep antagonism toward the westward enlargement of NATO and the European Union, and the Kremlin's military and political involvement in the Caucasus. However, to many Russians their country's conflict with Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia is part and parcel of the current confrontation with the west. The almost equal in frequency popping up of the collocation 'northern borderlands' (северные окраины *severnnye okrainy*) mostly corresponds to Finland, hence, in many ways to the broadly understood 'west' from Moscow's vantage of observation. From the Russian perspective of everyday use and current geopolitics, the three terms western, southern and northern *okrainy*, actually mean 'western *okrainy*.' On the other hand, the term 'eastern borderlands' (восточные окраины *vostochnnye okrainy*) is almost absent from common usage, despite Moscow's continuing standoff with Japan over the Kuril Islands (западные окраины, восточные окраины, южные окраины, северные окраины 2018).

With the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and Moscow's continuing military offensive in eastern Ukraine that commenced in the very same year (Wasiuta and Wasiuta 2017), the term 'western borderland(s)' (*zapadnaia okraina* / *zapadnye okrainy*) features more predominantly than its other forms connected to Russia's eastern, northern or southern frontiers. The name of 'Russia' in the collocation 'Russia's western borderlands' (западные окраины России *zapadnye okrainy Rossii*) is often replaced with that of 'Russian world' (Русский мир *Russkii mir*), yielding the novel phrase 'western borderlands of the Russian world' (западные окраины Русского мира *zapadnye okrainy Russkogo mira*) (Gai 2018; Shatskikh 2014; Shlykov 2016; Smirnov 2015). Or maybe this phrase is not that novel, given that in many ways the collocation 'Russian world' is a new ideologized term for the former Russian Empire that outlines the Kremlin's present-day geopolitical ambitions (Wasiuta and Wasiuta 2017: 267). The recent hike in Moscow's activities (ranging from cultural to economic to military) toward (or is it against?) these former imperial-cum-Soviet 'western borderlands' (cf Radin 2017; Standish 2017) seems to be legitimized with the revival of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian imperial idea that Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (perhaps alongside Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and maybe even Finland) are none other but 'western Russia' (западная

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<sup>4</sup> The Russian term 'near abroad' for referring to the former republics of the Soviet Union as seen from the perspective of the Russian Federation was coined in the early 1990s, immediately in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union (Spravochnik 1991: 163, 169; Zapeklyi and Vovchenko 2001).

Россия *zapadnaia Rossiia*)<sup>5</sup> (Frolov 2017; Solov'ev 2007: 14; Tseli 2010). The revived imperial ideology of 'western Russianism' (западнорус[с]изм *zapadnorus[s]izm*) is an important element of the ideology of the 'Russian world' (Taras 2018).



**Poland's eastern *kresy*** (Samotny Wędrowiec 2014 [copyright-free])

NB: The solid red marks the maximum territorial extent of Poland-Lithuania. Poland's eastern *kresy* encompass all the Polish-Lithuanian territories *outside* today's Polish borders.

## ***Kresy*: Polish Nationalism**

<sup>5</sup> Obviously, this present-day reading of the Russian imperial past is a bit anachronistic, because in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian imperial officials and intellectuals preferred the terms 'European Russia' (Европейская Россия *Evropeiskaia Rossiia*) or 'Western Land' (Западный край *zapadni krai*) to 'western Russia,' or basically spoke of distinctive regions of European Russia, for instance, 'Baltic gubernias' (Прибалтика *Pribaltika*), 'Northwestern Land' (Северо-Западный край *Severo-Zapadnyi krai*), or 'Southwestern Land' (Северо-Восточный край *Severo-Vostochnyi krai*). (I thank Catherine Gibson for pointing out the necessity of this terminological clarification.)

In the recent Russo-Ukrainian War (2014-), the Polish government and public opinion seem to be siding with Ukraine that is suffering under the Russian attack (Pawlik 2015; Polska pomoc 2018). The Belsat Television broadcasting in Belarusian from Poland to Belarus since 2007 appears to be serving the same purpose by countering the pro-Russian ideologies of western Russianism and Russian world (Belsat 2018; Pomoc represjonowanym 2018). But the situation is not that obvious when one looks at the Polish discourse on the country's eastern neighbors, which is overwhelmingly mediated through the lens of the Polish concept of *Kresy*. This is a plural form of the common Polish noun *kres* for 'end,' 'frontier' or 'borderland.' In Poland-Lithuania, this word was employed for referring to the militarized frontier with the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate (Święcki 1828: 7; Żurawski vel Grajewski 2016). At present *kres* is quite a rare and rather obscure word, 'end' is typically *koniec* in Polish, 'frontier' is *granica*, while 'borderland' – *pogranicze*. What survives well in contemporary Polish usage is the plural form of the noun *kres*, namely, *kresy*. The term *kresy* (still not yet capitalized) made its first extensive appearance as a cultural-cum-geographic concept in its own right in the Polish-language verse novel *Mohort* by Wincenty Pol, published in 1854 (Pol 1858 [1854]: 12, 22, 26, 43, 78, 92, 140, 160, 170). At that time, this verse novel gained much popularity, which in turn facilitated the rapid spread of this freshly coined usage among the Polish-Lithuanian nobility and the Polish intelligentsia then emerging from the former group (Eberhardt 2004; Jedlicki 1999).

With the rise of the Polish ethnolinguistic nationalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept of *kresy* was employed for denoting the eastern half of former Poland-Lithuania that at that time began to be perceived as 'not Polish' (Dura 1916; Jabłonowski 1910; *Kresy* 1906-1908; *Tygodnik Kresowy* 1917-1918; Wapiński 1994: 68-70, 85-96, 108-111). Significantly, the mass political movement informed by this ideology of Polish nationalism coalesced in the context of the hey-day of the imperial policy of Russianizing the western *okrainy* (1880s-1910s). Another impetus for the rise of the Polish national movement was the adoption of ethnolinguistic nationalism as the state ideology in the German Empire, founded as a German nation-state in 1871. Subsequently, in this empire, languages other than German (including Polish) were phased out from official and administrative use, or as media of school education. Polish-Lithuanian nobles-turned-Polish intelligentsia-turned-Polish nationalists, who saw Russification and Germanization as 'anti-Polish' policies, wanted to oppose them in order to save endangered 'Polish substance.' The 1867 overhauling of Austrian Empire into Austria-Hungary afforded them a good chance to have it their way, because in the Dual Monarchy, since 1869, these nobles and Polish nationalists enjoyed the vast autonomous crownland of Galicia with Polish as its sole official and administrative language. Autonomous Galicia provided the Polish national movement in the Russian Empire and the German Empire with a solid modernizing intellectual, economic and political base to fall back on in the time of need (Markovits and Sysyn 1982; Porter 2002).

What at that time was not really discussed or reflected upon was the dramatic change in the thinking about 'Poland' and 'the Poles.' In the traditional (early modern), estate (pre-national) politics of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility the defunct Poland-Lithuania was such 'Poland,' while the sobriquets of 'Poles' and 'Polish nation' (or rather *natio* in Latin) (*naród polski*) were reserved for the stratum of Polish-Lithuanian nobles and the Polish

intelligentsia spawned by the former. In the wake of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility's last disastrous uprising (1863-1864) against the Russian Empire, early Polish nationalists understood that the narrow social layer of nobles stood no chance against an imperial draft army. For the sake of any success in a military conflict with Russia, the country's entire population (irrespective of estate) would have to be included in the concept of 'Polish nation,' alongside peasants. (The unwavering focus on Russia was caused by the fact that about 80 percent of the former Polish-Lithuanian territory was included within this empire's boundaries.) To this end, they selected the Polish language and Roman Catholicism as the basis for constructing a non-estate Polish nation (Kamusella 2017).

The irony of this decision was that without saying so explicitly the Polish national movement gave up on the Polish-Lithuanian nobility's political idea of recreating Poland-Lithuania as a new Poland. In confessional terms, this newly-defined concept of the Polish nation excluded non-Roman Catholics, that is, Jews, Protestants and Uniates (Greek Catholics). Furthermore, from the linguistic perspective it excluded non-Polish-speakers, or those who spoke the Baltic language of Lithuanian, or noted down their Slavic languages in 'non-Polish' (often referred to as 'Russian') Cyrillic letters, that is, Belarusians and Ukrainians (Myśl 1916: 96, 164). However, from the spatial perspective at least two-thirds of former Poland-Lithuania were predominantly inhabited by such ethnic non-Poles. Hence, the adoption of this ethnolinguistic definition of the Polish-nation effectively limited the concept of the Polish nation-state to the westernmost third of former Poland-Lithuania (Wapiński 1994).

But that possibility would be an utter abhorrence to many Polish-Lithuanian nobles who had recently turned into Polish ethnolinguistic nationalists. They wanted a 'big country,' like Poland-Lithuania, not a small ethnic Poland, as entailed by the ethnolinguistic formula of Polish nationalism (Beauvois 2005; Bilenky 2012: 82). Polish nationalists hoped for a new Poland that would be an (imperial) power on a par with Russia, a recreation of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Poland-Lithuania that had successfully waged wars against Muscovy, including the four pro-Polish-Lithuanian or Polish-Lithuanian tsars installed at Moscow between 1605 and 1612. This heartfelt wish, in blatant breach with the ethnolinguistic definition of the Polish nation, led to the Polish national movement's 'historic claim' of the ethnically non-Polish two-thirds of the Polish-Lithuanian territory for the Polish nation-state. *Kresy* was adopted then as an ideologically suitable term for referring to these areas. It became *the* concept for emphasizing the '(historic) Polish character' of these lands and the belief of Polish nationalists that a future Polish nation-state would have the right to incorporate all or most of the *kresy* (A N R 1917; Darowski 1919; Górny 2017; Wasilewski 1917). This approach came together with the rarely explicitly acknowledged policy of Polonization (*polonizacja*) that was to reverse the former Russian imperial policy of Russification and nullify the advances of the Belarusian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian national movements (Kamusella 2013).

In this approach to thinking about a territory through the sole lens of the confessionally and linguistically (scripturally) defined ethnicities of its inhabitants, the Polish term *kresy* is the very reverse of the earlier coined Russian term *okrainy*. Soon such ethnically non-Polish areas that Polish nationalists nonetheless claimed for a proposed Polish nation-state were identified in the west and in the south, looking from the ethnically Polish



core, as spatially delineated by the cities Warsaw, Cracow and Poznań. Hence, the term *kresy* was modified with adjectival forms of the cardinal directions, yielding *kresy wschodnie* ('eastern borderlands') (Jaskólski 1920: 7), *kresy zachodnie* ('western borderlands'), and *kresy południowe* ('southern borderlands') (Balzer 1989: 26; Glabisz c 1920; Sayssse-Tobiczyk 1919). In interwar Poland the term *Kresy* gained its initial capital letter *K*, while its meaning was increasingly geared to the restive non-Polish eastern half of the country that ethnically was Belarusian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian (Przybylski 1927). With the stabilization of the Polish-Soviet border in the wake of the Soviet-Polish War (1919-1921), some 50 percent of the entire *Kresy* found themselves in the Soviet Socialist Republics of Belarus and Ukraine, while the rest in Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Ironically, in interwar Poland the *Kresy Wschodnie* ('eastern borderlands') accounted for the eastern half of the country (Kostrowicka 1994: V; Łukomski 2006: 280). This situation lent the Soviet authorities an easy argument to claim that Warsaw was guilty of the unjustified partition of Soviet Belarus, Soviet Ukraine and even of partitioning 'bourgeois' Lithuania, from which Poland had seized its capital of Vilnius and the city's vicinity in 1920. But the actual discussion between Moscow and Warsaw was a prolongation of the earlier Russian imperial and Polish nationalist discourses that saw the populations of Russia's western *okrainy* and Poland's eastern *kresy* in a dehumanized manner as, respectively, этнографическая масса *etnograficheskaia massa* (Hrushevs'kii 1904: 165; Miliukov 1898: 261; *Vestnik* 1891: 921) and *masa etnograficzna* (Dmowski 1908: 162; Gawroński 1906: 12, 20; Górny 2013: 129-130; Wasilewski 1929: 10, 12), or 'ethnographic mass' that 'awaited being molded' into this or that nation. Russian imperialism (nationalism) and Polish nationalism were posed by their proponents as the 'sole civilizing force' in this region.<sup>6</sup> This self-proclaimed 'historic mission' of both movements was to overhaul this 'passive ethnographic mass' into self-conscious Russians and Poles.

In spatial terms, the interwar Polish concept of (eastern) *Kresy* corresponded to the Russian imperial one of (western) *окраины okrainy*. With the exception of Finland, Estonia and Bessarabia (or today's Moldova), Imperial Russia's western *okrainy* overlapped with interwar Poland's eastern *Kresy*. Warsaw firmly excluded Latvia and more tentatively Lithuania from the territorial ambit of such *Kresy*. Imperial Russia-turned-the Soviet Union, with the use of the ideological guise of 'internationalism,' did not feel to be obliged to follow Poland's example in these limited resignations. In the eyes of Soviet decision-makers the imperial concept of western *okrainy* (especially for the sake of exporting communist revolution westward), though not mentioned in official documents, it was acted upon and continued to contain Latvia and Lithuania, alongside the ethnically Belarusian and Ukrainian lands. Furthermore, the spatial extent of the western *okrainy* took in Finland, Estonia and most of interwar Poland. This thinking

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<sup>6</sup> In 1840 German-language historiography a potent idea appeared that it was 'the Germans' who had first 'civilized' Poland and the Poles (Roepell 1840: 333-334). Seven years later, in 1847, Polish historians readily took over this idea creatively transforming it into that of 'Polish civilizing mission in the east,' without which – presumably – the Belarusians, Latvians, Lithuanians, or Ukrainians would have had no chance to enter European culture and civilization (Szajnocha 1847: 24-25). During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish noble politicians, and later Polish nationalists, adopted this condescendingly colonial attitude toward the eastern half of the former Polish Lithuanian lands, despite suffering the very same indignity at hands of German-speaking (German) civil servants and politicians in the Austrian Empire (Austria-Hungary) and Prussia (German Empire) (Kwiecińska 2017).

about the ethnically non-Polish and non-Russian countries and populations between ethnic Poland and ethnic Russia inescapably put Poland and the Soviet Union on a collision course. The Soviet Union as a direct successor of the Russian Empire won in this long-winded power struggle. After World War II the ethnonational ambitions of Belarusians and Ukrainians were met by adding ethnically the Belarusian and Ukrainian segments of interwar Poland's *Kresy* to Soviet Belarus and Soviet Ukraine. Furthermore, the Kremlin passed Vilnius and its vicinity to Lithuania, which was then made into another union republic of the Soviet Union. Finland barely managed to fend off the Soviet attack (1939-1940), whereas Estonia and Latvia were corralled as union republics into the Soviet Union, while Poland was made into a satellite state firmly contained within the post-1945 Soviet bloc. The Kremlin emerged victorious from the competition with Poland over the western *okrainy* and *Kresy*. About 72 percent of the territory of former Poland-Lithuania found itself within the postwar Soviet Union, while only 28 per cent in communist Poland.

The unequal division of the territory of former Poland-Lithuania between Poland and the Soviet Union (including the transfer of all the *Kresy* to the latter state) after World War II was sealed by the state-agreed and managed mutual ethnic cleansing, of ethnic Poles from the enlarged Soviet Union to postwar Poland and of remaining ethnic Belarusians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians from communist Poland to the Soviet republics of Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine. Numerous Poles hated what happened, decrying the loss of 'their *Kresy*,' where they were born and used to live. However, Stalin 'indemnified' Poland with the vast German territories east of the Oder-Neisse line, from where the ethnic German populations were summarily expelled, as agreed between Moscow and the western Allies at Potsdam. The Red Army remained the sole guarantor of this new Polish-German frontier, because neither West Germany nor the western Allies de jure recognized this border until the 1990 German-Polish border treaty, ratified two years later in 1992 (Kamusella 2010).

In interwar Poland the rarely employed term western *Kresy* never referred to such vast territories, as those passed to Poland from Germany after 1945. In one third, today's Poland is composed from the German territories that after the war were officially dubbed in a highly ideologized fashion as 'Recovered Territories' (*Ziemie Odzyskane*) (Sakson 2006). No eastern *Kresy* remained in the Polish nation-state after 1945. Actually, for preventing any questioning of the postwar status quo and the Soviet domination in Poland, censorship banned the use of the term *Kresy* from any publications produced in communist Poland (Kolbuszewski 1994: 167). Similarly, the ideologized term *okrainy* was avoided in the Soviet Union.

In postcommunist Poland the *Kresy* discourse was swiftly revived during the 1990s, the trend clearly reflected in English-language literature on matters Polish (kres,kresy 2018a), and even more clearly in German-language publications on Polish history and culture (kres,kresy 2018b). In 2006 *Kresowiacy* (or people stemming from the *Kresy*) gained a vibrant online information portal that gathers their publications and organizations both in Poland and 'in the *Kresy*' (meaning Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine). At present the Polish Senate co-finances this portal and uses it as a semi-official channel to project Polish soft power 'in the east' (*na Wschodzie*, obviously

meaning the *Kresy*) (Kresy24.pl 2018; *Wschodnia Gazeta* 2018). Interestingly, comparing the frequency of the use of the Russian term *okrainy* to the Polish concept of *Kresy* in English-language scholarly literature (kresy,okrainy 2018), it becomes immediately apparent that the former dominated from the mid-1940s through the 1970s, when the west paid more attention to the Soviet Union than to the Soviet satellites, and when for ideological reasons Polish scholars based in communist Poland were not permitted to employ the term *Kresy* in their writings. In the period of full détente (1975-1979) and during the 1980s when the Soviet power waned, both *Kresy*- and *okrainy*-centered discourses gained a parity in English-language publications. On the other hand, in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the *Kresy* discourse grew exponentially, while the *okrainy* discourse was halved. As a result around 2000 the term *Kresy* popped up in English-language publications five times more frequently than its Russian counterpart *okrainy* (kresy,okrainy 2018).

	<b>OKRAINY</b>
	Finland
	Estonia
	eastern & central Poland
<b>K</b>	Latvia
<b>R</b>	Lithuania
<b>E</b>	Belarus
<b>S</b>	Ukraine
<b>Y</b>	
	Moldova

**Russia’s eastern *okrainy* and Poland’s *kresy* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

### Nothing About Us Without Us?

Following the successive breakups of the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union, nowadays both the Russian term western *okrainy* and the Polish *Kresy* refer to the territories *outside* of today’s Russian Federation and Poland, that is, to the post-Polish-Lithuanian nation-states located between these two countries, namely, to Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine. During the 1990s it appeared that the Russian-Soviet imperial discourse and the Polish nationalist discourse with imperialist undertones, which treated the ethnically non-Russian and non-Polish territories and populations located between ethnic Russia and Poland as an object of politics, definitively came to an end. That from now on both Russian and Polish politicians would respect the sovereign wishes of the Belarusians, Latvians, Lithuanians or Ukrainians to decide about themselves and their nation-states as they see it fit.

But meanwhile in Poland, the veritable explosion of publications devoted to the *Kresy* during the 1990 (cf 1443 bibliographic items in 1989-2000 [Słowo kresy 2018a]) almost doubled in the following decade (cf 2452 bibliographic items in 2001-2011 [Słowo kresy 2018b]). The trend continues, as evidenced by 1,870,000 hits for the Google search on

the term 'kresy' (kresy 2018). In comparison, the Russian term 'western *okrainy*' scored a mere 30,500 hits ("западные окраины" 2018), while its close synonym 'Russia's *okrainy*' scored just three times more at 117,000 ("окраины России" 2018). The popular 1990s Russian term 'near abroad' (ближнее зарубежье *blizhnee zarubezh'e*) for denoting the western *okrainy* fares much better in the internet at 550,000 hits ("ближнее зарубежье" 2018). But the Putin era's buzz collocation of 'Russian world' wins hands down at 2,200,000 hits ("русский мир" 2018), thanks to the eponymous state-supported foundation Russkii Mir (founded in 2007) with branches all around the world, whose activities are coordinated, advertised and supported by a lavishly produced online information portal, unsurprisingly dubbed Russkii Mir (*Russkii mir* 2018; Russkii Mir 2018). According to the Kremlin, all (native) Russian-speakers in the post-Soviet states, especially west of the Russian Federation, are simplistically seen as Russians, their loyalty predicted and encouraged to be to Russia alone, *not* to the country of their residence (Law on Citizenship 2014; Putin Changes 2014). This approach serves to legitimize Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea and the continuing Russo-Ukrainian War (Riazanov 2015; «Ukrintsy» 2017).

On the other hand, the present-day Polish discourse on the *Kresy* is channeled through the concept of *polskie mniejszości narodowe* (Polish national minorities), defined as ethnically Polish populations living outside Poland *but* exclusively in the *Kresy*, or the former Polish-Lithuanian territories. (For talking about the Polish populations residing elsewhere in the world the Latinate term *Polonia* is employed<sup>7</sup>) (Diaspora polska 2018). Members of such broadly and imprecisely defined 'Polish national minorities' can apply for the ethnic Pole's ID (*Karta Polaka*), introduced in 2007 (Ustawa 2007). First of all, this document symbolically reasserts one's membership in the Polish nation. At the practical level the ethnic Pole's ID gives its holder the right to work in Poland, alongside full access to state-provided free education and healthcare. Interestingly, although the targeted populations mostly live in Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine, this document is offered to any eligible citizen of all the post-Soviet states (Karta 2018). Hence, from the Russian perspective, it is a bit of annoyance that Poland dares to treat the entire territory of the 'Russian world' as *Kresy*-like (Ładykowski 2018).

But where do the 'Russian world' (*okrainy*) and *Kresy* discourses leave the most impacted nations of Belarusians, Latvians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians? Moscow and Warsaw take unilaterally all kinds of decisions that one way or another impact the nation-states located between Russia and Poland without much regard for the needs and feelings of the populations living there. Obviously, the Kremlin is more open and self-assured in this policy, given the qualified success of Moscow's recent attempt at reviving Russia as a global player of world politics. In contrast, the Polish authorities' moves in

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<sup>7</sup> This term *Polonia* is an adaptation of the Latin name of Poland, that is, *Polonia*. Interestingly, this Latin name of Poland was developed between 1000 and 1005 in the imperial chancery of the Holy Roman Empire, and only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century appeared in Polish-language sources as *Polska*. This means that the Latin name yielded its Polish-language counterpart, not the other way round, as it is popularly believed (Urbańczyk 2008).

The term *Polonia* (sometimes spelled *Polonja*) for referring to the Polish diaspora *outside* the former territories of Poland-Lithuania appeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf *Przegląd* 1904: 256), and became popularly accepted in interwar Poland (cf Jarzębecki 1934).

this respect are more a kind of subterfuge or 'fudging' to the tune of 'national rights' ethnically understood and expressed both through the Polish language and Roman Catholicism (this religion in the *Kresy* simplistically equated with Polishness).

I believe it is highly offensive and inappropriate to pose a whole group of neighboring states as a 'borderland' of one's own country (cf Khalchak 2014). At best, it is an unthinking revival of a misguided imperial (or imperial-like) policy from the sad past that was blighted by generalized warfare and violence. But, on the other hand, both the discourses present a clear threat to the independent existence of the nation-states included within the Polish category of *Kresy* or the Russian one of *okrainy*-cum-'Russian world.' Neither Belarusians, nor Latvians, nor Lithuanians, nor Ukrainians see their countries as part of any Polish eastern or Russian western borderland. They do not see themselves as inferior to the Polish or Russian nation or in any need of guidance either from Warsaw or Moscow. This ritualized Polish and Russian lexical disrespect for the nations of Belarusians, Latvians, Lithuanian, or Ukrainians, seems to be of compensatory character. That is exactly *how* the Poles hated to be treated by the Germans and the Russians (Soviets) by the Americans (and the Germans during World War II). A defense of the terms *Kresy* and *okrainy*-cum-'Russian world' often offers the specious 'commonsense explanation' that it is 'just a way of talking,' part and parcel of the historic and cultural baggage of the Polish or Russian language; that nothing unseemly, let alone sinister, is intended or meant. But languages are products of human will and decisions. If some regrettable policies from the past are really condemned and not to be acted upon, then the vocabulary must move on, as well. How much would Poles or Russians appreciate their countries to be referred to as памежжа *pamiežža* in Belarusian, *robeža* in Latvian, *ribos* in Lithuanian, or прикордоніе *prikordonie* in Ukrainian? Isn't it so that first of all one needs to respect others if one wants their respect in return? Especially, the Polish public opinion and intellectuals should know better, given that from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Prussia / Germany treated the Polish ethnic area / interwar Poland as the core of some 'peripheral East' (*Ost, Ostland, Ostmarken*) in need of colonization and civilizing by Germans who 'stood at a higher level of cultural development'<sup>8</sup> (Górny 2014; JK 1849; Liulevicius 2009).

Many naively thought that – after the fall of communism, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the rapid democratization of central Europe and much of eastern Europe, complemented by the replacement of centrally-planned economy with its free market counterpart – no place would be left for any Russian, let alone Polish, *mission civilisatrice*.<sup>9</sup> That finally the long-sought-for goal was achieved in the form of Europe of

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<sup>8</sup> Although the German-language phrase *deutsche Zivilisationsmission im Osten* ('German civilizing mission in the East') appeared for the first time in print in 1939 (Pflaum 1961: 166), the postwar Polish anti-German propaganda readily seized it (translated into Polish as *niemiecka misja cywilizacyjna na Wschodzie*) for criticizing West Germany and interpreting German history from a highly ideologized standpoint (cf Labuda 1963: 45; Ociepka 1997: 108).

<sup>9</sup> A curious example of the continuing 'Polish civilizing mission in the East' (*polska misja cywilizacyjna na Wschodzie*) (cf Stępnik 1994: 161) is the present-day institutional discrimination of the Belarusian language in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Harodnia (Grodno) in today's Belarus. Some Catholic hierarchs and priests of this diocese disparage Belarusian as a 'heathen language,' pressing Belarusian seminarians and faithful to use instead the 'civilized and Christian language,' that is, Polish (Rudkouski 2009: 202).



democracy, human rights, stability, security and cooperation as epitomized by the European Union and the Council of Europe. However, the 2008 financial crisis, the west's acquiescence to Putin's annexation of Crimea and the inflow of 2.5 million migrants in 2015-2016 to the EU of half a billion inhabitants lumped together were sufficient to shake the European project to its core. Complacency re-opened a dangerous path to power for far-right and far-left radicals. In this fundamentally changed political landscape, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Turkey's President Recep Erdoğan look as harbingers of a new brave future steeped in autocracy, national egoisms and unprincipled warfare. Do we really need to go back to such a future? Weren't the two world wars, the Holocaust of Jews and Roma, and the multidirectional mass expulsions of 60 million people during the 1930s and 1940s a lesson enough?

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